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C O N F I D E N T I A L SECTION 01 OF 02 HARARE 000741

SIPDIS

DEPT FOR U/S BURNS, AF A/S NEWMAN/DAS WOODS
OVP FOR NULAND
NSC FOR ABRAMS, COURVILLE

E.O. 12958: DECL: 05/27/2015

TAGS: [PGOV](#) [PREL](#) [PHUM](#) [ZI](#) [MDC](#)

SUBJECT: MDC HEAD ON GROWING UNREST; WASHINGTON TRIP

REF: HARARE 737

Classified By: Ambassador Christopher W. Dell under Section 1.4 b/d

Summary

1. MDC Head Morgan Tsvangirai met with the Ambassador May 27 to discuss the growing unrest in the country. Tsvangirai said the GOZ seemed to be trying to provoke a response that it could crush but may have miscalculated given the numbers of people involved and their desperation. He said the opposition, including civil society leaders, had met that morning to discuss how to help organize the discontent so that it could be sustained over time and lead to real change. Tsvangirai said that despite the unrest he was still interested in visiting Washington the latter half of June, with the exact date depending on the Secretary's availability. End Summary.

Operation Create Disorder

2. (C) Tsvangirai said the only logical explanation for the GOZ's recent actions (reftel) was to provoke a response that it could then crush. Otherwise, &Operation Restore Order8 made no sense, either politically or economically. He said it would inevitably provoke such a reaction. The government had never before been more hated nor relied so overtly on naked force to maintain its control. As with commercial farmers and other targets, Mugabe had defined the urban informal economy as a source of opposition and he was determined to crush it. However, this time there were more people involved and they were more desperate, with no other options; he was sowing the seeds of civil unrest.

3. (C) The Ambassador said it was his experience that when people's survival mechanisms were threatened, as in this case, civil unrest could erupt quickly. The opposition needed to ensure that unrest was led soberly. Tsvangirai agreed completely, noting that while anger was building, it needed to be expressed in a sustainable fashion, not simply erupt spontaneously. Tsvangirai noted that the people had erupted in street protests only once in recent years, the 1998 food riots. The Zimbabwean people needed to be organized and led and to that end he had met that morning with leaders of civil society to coordinate on how best to encourage and harness the growing discontent.

4. (C) Tsvangirai added that the opposition must avoid falling into one of Mugabe's traps. The MDC and its allies needed to help organize democratic resistance but needed to avoid the spotlight. There would be no public statements that would allow the regime to paint protesters as pro-MDC and give it an excuse for the crackdown. He asked if there had been any response from Washington on the MDC's request for support to channel civil discontent. The Ambassador said the USG was focused on 2008 as the next opportunity for change, but would obviously take another look if the current crisis worsened.

MDC Internal Divisions

5. (C) Tsvangirai acknowledged that internal MDC tensions had led to violence at the party's headquarters the week before, when the senior leadership had been out of the country in Mauritius. He said he had restored order upon his return and that an investigation was ongoing. The senior leadership itself was unified. He suspected the youths who had initiated the violence might have been paid to do so by the GOZ, but had nonetheless stressed to the party the importance of remaining focused on restoring democracy to Zimbabwe, and not fighting among themselves.

Washington Trip

16. (C) Tsvangirai said he was open to a trip to Washington sometime between June 15 and June 25. The exact date would depend on the Secretary,s availability. He planned to stop in West Africa on his way to the U.S. However, while the trip was important, if the crisis in the country worsened, he might have to once more delay it.

Comment

17. (C) We would agree that the GOZ is playing with fire and that if it continues its current crackdown on the urban informal economy it will provoke civil unrest, possibly on a greater scale than any unrest since 1998. The fact is this is playing out against a backdrop of severe food and fuel shortages and accelerating economic decline that is already sapping the regime,s eroded popularity and further undermining its legitimacy. That said, the GOZ appears ready and able to crush discontent, unless it is on a very large scale. And we have seen no signs yet that this is likely, nor that the MDC and its allies know how to make it happen.
DELL